

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Via Zoom conference call
Wednesday, June 3, 2020, 7:00 pm

Present: Stephanie Kaplan, Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Drew Lamb, Pat Johnson, Mark Brown

Guests: Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Scott Bassage

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:09 pm.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: Neal added discussion of the Worcester Range under "Other Business."
3. Approve minutes: Julie Hand made a motion to approve the minutes of the 5/13/2020 meeting, as edited. The motion was seconded and passed 7-0.
4. Conservation Fund Balance: The current balance is \$71,620.31. The Chair noted that the Selectboard is reviewing the FY21 budget and how it can be reduced to lower the tax rate in response to COVID19. The preliminary list of areas for reduction included reducing the amount authorized to be contributed to the Fund in the upcoming fiscal year budget from \$8,000 to \$6,000 as part of that effort.
5. Tree Plantings: Several interested residents and Nicko (of East Hill Tree Farm) met recently to discuss tree plantings (using the EAB grant money). Neal reported that they considered locations at the Town Hall, Town Office, the school, and the Robinson Hill Cemetery's green burial site (planning is in progress but may be a while until the Cemetery Commission is ready to decide on plantings). Nicko will be doing approximately 6-12 tree plantings in the fall, following the Commission's direction on location.

Drew is going to meet with the school principal to consider possible planting locations at the school. The group considered locations. Scott Bassage commented that historic photographs show the Town Hall in the midst of green fields with a background of forest behind the Town Office. There is something special about coming down Kent Hill Road and being able to take in the whole of Gospel Hollow with the Town Hall as the jewel. The view from Kent Hill Road is an important one, and he made the plea to leave the visibility open. He added that he believes the Design Advisory Board (covering Kent's Corner historic district) would find it important to leave the view open, but may be very much in favor of planting fruit trees toward the back of the site near the edible garden and around the septic mound. The back elevator addition may be a location for a small planting. Any of the three areas visited do need approval from the Design Advisory Board. (Their job is

to make people understand what the design goals are for an historic area, and discuss plans.)

The Commission planned to warn a meeting to visit potential sites and create a proposal for review by the appropriate body.

6. EAB Traps and Report: Vermont Forest and Parks contacted the Chair about hanging two purple traps in Calais ash trees (to lure and trap Emerald Ash Borers); the traps are used to learn whether EABs are in a particular location. Neal noted that near Route 14 in southern Calais would be closest to known infestations; Scott mentioned a location near his house with a stand of ash.

Neal will coordinate with Pat and Julie on dates for hanging the signs for the ash tree corridor.

7. Conservation Fund Guidelines Revisions: Stephanie had sent out the guidelines with some revisions and noted that she changed the document's name from "Guidelines" to "Calais Conservation Fund Policies and Procedures," making clear that the document is in fact the policy and procedures of the town, and not just suggested guidelines. Stephanie has asked Eric Sorenson to review the criteria. Scott wondered if Vermont Housing and Conservation Board may be a place to seek grant monies and offered to look into it.

The group recalled that the Vermont statute that creates the Fund guidelines is the source of the language in the guidelines regarding "important historic resources" and that it could be broadly interpreted to mean "historic natural resources." Larry noted his personal view that Conservation Fund money should not be used for human buildings, and that leaving it in the guidelines as written can be construed as such. State and federal funds exist for the purpose of conserving historic buildings. Scott noted that the contribution of the Fund toward preserving the Armstrong Farm really made the Town's effort doable (an agricultural effort). The group considered the nuance of qualifications (such as "*significant* agricultural land") in the section on "Criteria of Use of Conservation Commission Fund."

The Commission reviewed the Town's previous support of the Armstrong Farm (an easement was added, and development rights were stripped). The Land Trust created a complex "package" including raising local donations; the Conservation Fund was essential in Calais preserving this farm. The group discussed the importance of the Fund to be able to continue to be utilized for Calais farm conservation; Stephanie will check in with the Land Trust about this.

The group discussed ensuring the Fund Policies articulate that the Commission expects to be part of a potential recipient's decision making process; the official application should be referenced in the Policies as well. Larry will review the documents and work on editing for harmony between what the Policies say and what the application requires.

8. Bliss Pond Town Forest Walks: Larry presented an informal idea for getting the public involved in thinking about and getting involved in the Town Forest, by offering to take residents on hikes back there (with practices consistent with health guidelines). Few people in Calais know about the Town Forest, and a purpose of the offering would be to help Calais people become more aware of the Forest ahead of a town discussion on the future of the Forest. Commission members were very enthusiastic about the idea, and thought through improving trail signage (including making them accessible for folks who are color blind). A trailhead kiosk may be a future idea (they noted need for communicating with the Old West Church organization about how this may impact their parking area). Drew will communicate with the VT YCC as a resource for building a trail kiosk. Larry will share a draft FPF post advertising the walk.
9. Review Natural Resources Inventory: Matt Peters several years ago conducted a Natural Resources Inventory and wrote a report in which he identified some unusual or important natural resources on private property. Initial communication by letters to landowners resulted in nearly no response. Stephanie suggested that we all re-read the Inventory report and see if we find anything notable that we may want to contact the landowner about protecting. The Commission considered how to approach protecting resources, and connecting with landowners in an individual communication about such resources on their properties. Drew noted small ponds on private properties that he will look into.
10. Other business: The State is doing their 20-year planning cycle on a large tract of state land within the Worcester Range, and seeking public input. Neal sees this as a potential for a huge tract of forever wild forest and is writing a letter to send in his opinion and the Commission discussed submitting a letter as a Commission. Neal will learn more about the state's process and let the Commission know if/how it may submit its feedback and eventually draft language.
11. Public comment: None.
12. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Date: 6/10/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas

Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 9/8/2020 meeting